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PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS



IS BOILED COFFEE HARMFUL?—THREE VIEWS

I HAVE recently learned something about the making of coffee that I should like to convey to the readers of the JOURNAL. With some people coffee seriously disagrees, and it seems to be because the coffee is brought beyond the boiling point in temperature, thus forming some acid, and changing chemically the properties of the coffee, producing a poison. Coffee made in a percolator has a smooth taste and none of the poisonous or bad after-effects. There is just one other way in which it can be made so that it is non-injurious, and that is by putting the pulverized coffee into a cotton flannel bag suspended in a pot with a bulging bottom, the pot made for that purpose, and pouring the hot water on the coffee and setting the pot in a dish of hot water on the stove. The pot should not be set directly on the stove, as it then would receive enough heat to produce the poisonous properties.

Coffee made in a percolator is made by putting cold water in the bottom of the pot, which is pumped up onto the coffee, which is in a percolated top. As the water heats, the color gradually changes from a light to a dark coffee color, and the water is thrown onto the glass top, so that one can see when the coffee is done. The pot is of aluminum, and at the bottom is only a little larger than a silver dollar, while the surface exposed to the water is only a little larger than a five cent piece.

The world universally should be educated in properly making a beverage that is so commonly used, and no people have so great an opportunity for giving this instruction as nurses.

E. C. H.

I HAVE used coffee made in the two ways mentioned, and they are certainly good ways, judging by the results. To know whether they would avoid all the bad effects suffered by some people, I believe we would have to do some thorough testing on both bad stomachs and wayward dispositions before we could make the all-cure statement. There is a coffee-pot made which has the cotton flannel bag as a part of it. It is ugly in appearance but is economical, as it only requires the boiling water and no fire to continue the making.

MARY C. WHEELER.

THE best authority I know of on the coffee-making question is Dr. Vulté of Columbia. He says that unless coffee is kept *at* the boiling point for an appreciable length of time the *cafféol*, the volatile oil upon which the flavor of coffee depends, is not developed. This is why ordinary filtered coffee has a raw, unsatisfactory taste. On the other hand, if the coffee is boiled for a considerable length of time, tannic acid develops. This is undesirable because tannic acid interferes with digestion, particularly with starch digestion. It is this acid which gives the bitter taste to coffee which has been boiled too long. This is, I think, the acid to which your correspondent refers, but I think she is not strictly correct in calling it a poison.

Prolonged boiling also drives off the very volatile oil which we wish to keep for the sake of its flavor. It is of course impossible in ordinary apparatus to raise coffee above the boiling point. All we can do is to keep it boiling.

Dr. Vulté also says that coffee boiled with a large amount of water contains more tannic acid than coffee boiled with a small amount of water. His way of making coffee, therefore, is to pour over the coffee a small amount of boiling water, bring it quickly to the boiling point again and boil about one minute. It is then diluted with hot water to suit the taste. In this way he gets the flavor due to the *cafféol* and keeps the tannic acid down to the smallest amount consistent with good coffee.

Now a percolator coffee-pot so arranged that the water is actually at the boiling point when it goes on the coffee, makes good coffee, which is undoubtedly more healthful than carelessly made boiled coffee, and it is the best kind of a coffee-pot to put in the hands of a person who can't be trusted to stop the boiling at the end of a minute or two.

All of this applies to the injurious effects of coffee on the digestion, not on the heart or nerves. The bad effects of coffee on the heart and nerves are due to *cafféin*, and that is extracted by either process.

ANNA B. HAMMAN.



THE first and chief characteristic of science is that it seeks always after nature, after the normal, *i.e.*, the natural, and looks askance upon the abnormal and the super- or the sub-natural. Hence the call of a scientific age for normal, natural life and healthy living: hence its disapproval of disease, hence its disgust with dirt as a cause of disease, and its belief in public health as well as private welfare.—WILLIAM T. SEDGWICK, in *Yale Medical Journal*.